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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author traces the phases in the historical development of the functions of the principalship in Canada -- from administration by imitation and innovation to the administrator as planner. The author emphasizes the planning function of the principalship and suggests that by delegating more responsibility to staffs and teachers, principals will provide themselves with more time to devote to goal setting and the evaluation of alternatives. (JF)

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PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT: NEW ROLES FOR THE PRINCIPAL

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Defining and redefining various administrative roles has become a standard topic for discussion at conferences, the subject of many journal articles, and the object of numerous research projects. Many of us probably have wondered -- privately if not publicly -- when the examination would be complete. We have waited for the day when there would be consensus among the analysts and congruence between the should be and the is of administrative practice. Unfortunately, that day has not yet arrived. Continuing pressures for change force us to reconsider earlier concepts and to subject the practices of the present to critical examination. This paper is a modest attempt toward a partial reconceptualization of the functions -- or more correctly, of dominant emphases in the functions -- of principals. As the title indicates, particular attention will be given in the sections which follow to examining the planning and development emphasis in the principal's role. The discussion is set within a general framework of concern for what the principalship has been, what it is now, and what it might become i[illegible]. Some attention will be given also to the difficulties which the future emphases might present for us both as practitioners and as students of administration.

Principals Past, Present and Future

Intuitively there seems to be some logic in asking where we have been and where we are now before we proceed to ask ourselves where we should be heading. Perhaps the need to look back is only an indication that most of us feel somewhat more comfortable when playing the role of historian than that of prophet. Fortunately, the

principalship in Western Canada does have a sufficiently long and sufficiently interesting history to permit this type of analysis. An historical examination could be carried out purely for amusement; however, it may also hold some lessons for what the principalship might become. Historical analysis is particularly helpful in identifying a range of possible variations in functions and in differing conceptions of good administrative practice for this position. In order to gain some insights into the contributions of this perspective we might consider the two historical periods which coincide approximately with the last two decades. In each of these principals were faced with unique problems, developed somewhat distinctive emphases in their functions, and were evaluated by their colleagues or superiors on the basis of quite different criteria.

Administration by Imitation

Although the principalship was an established position long before the 1950's, it came into prominence as a significant part of the administrative structure of school systems in Western Canada during that decade. This period was characterized by major moves toward the centralization of schools in the rural areas and by the accelerating growth of urban school systems. Villages that once boasted a three-teacher school suddenly found that these established institutions were surrounded by a cluster of somewhat varied buildings all of which exhibited the distinctive characteristics of rural schools. Not only did the number of positions in larger schools increase, but new functions were also thrust upon the principal. Occupants of relatively high status positions as senior teachers

with limited administrative responsibilities suddenly found themselves trying to cope with a host of unfamiliar problems: inadequate facilities, increasing enrolments, scarce and poorly prepared teachers, and all the other problems of a much more complex situation than the one to which they had become accustomed. The fact that these problems were overcome and that schools did operate, more or less successfully, is a great credit to the teachers and the administrators of that era. Of interest to this discussion is the question of how principals coped with the problems that have been mentioned. What functions were emphasized and in what ways?

The process which took place -- as revealed by recollection and reflection, not documentary analysis -- seemed to have some of the following features. It must be remembered at the outset that change is not unique to the present day; the 1950's represented a period of significant educational change for many areas. Problems and new demands appeared in rapid succession. Indeed, the problems came so quickly that there were too few resources, insufficient time, and too many constraints to permit the type of detailed examination that might have been desirable. Necessity did force administrators to find solutions, some of which were no doubt close to optimal for the circumstances; other were barely acceptable. Some solutions were probably the product of careful thought while others were accidental discoveries. No matter what the origin, there did emerge a catalogue or repetoire of accepted ways of coping with various situations. By drawing upon this source of solutions principals were able to organize school programs which would not have been thought

possible a few years previously, to compensate for deficiencies in the teaching staff, and to cope with the problems of operating a complex organization. Although novel practices were introduced, many of the concerns of the day as well as their solutions carried the stamp of an orientation to the past. By present standards principals were highly conservative in the identification of problems and in the values which guided the search for solutions. As an example we have but to recall the concern for standards of student dress and conduct as well as the codes that schools adopted in response to these concerns. The contrast with accepted practice of today is startling to say the least.

What was good administrative practice of that era and what were the distinguishingcharacteristics of a successful principal? It seems in retrospect that good administrative practice was that which coped with the problems of the day using the standards of the past. Novel solutions were applauded if they were acceptable according to professional and community standards. Consequently, there was a high degree of individual caution and a great amount of interest in what was being practiced in other schools and in other school districts. The communication of solutions and successful practices held high priority in discussions at administrators' meetings. Provincial superintendents tried to play down their inspectorial functions and justified their itinerancy by identifying it as a means for disseminating information about good practices. There seemed to be consensus -- for a time at least -- on the characteristics of the good school: it was the composite of good practices prevalent in a particular geographic area. The outstanding schools and the highly successful principals

were the ones which had acquired and developed a mix of the greatest number of generally-accepted good practices.

In retrospect, the principal can be seen as performing the function of solving the crisis situations and of coping with the many operational problems which confronted the school from day to day. Although the literature admonished them even in that day to become the instructional leaders of their schools, their actual performance seems to have been far removed from this ideal. Because principals looked to each other for solutions, their general orientation can be described in no better terms than to say that it was administration by imitation. The best principals may have developed unique approaches to their work; however, reliance on "good" practices developed elsewhere was probably the standard operating style of the majority of principals.

Administration by Innovation

Signs of the second phase of the principalship appeared before the first phase had become firmly established, let alone before it had started to wane. The good administrative practices and the good school organization of one day were labelled all too soon as the traditional modes of organization, traditional staffing patterns, and traditional approaches to student control. The good principal of one era became the traditional one of the next; in keeping with the scientific terminology of that day, it might be said that a principal's half-life period was about five years.

Most schools and their administrators persisted in the practices which had proven themselves and which had been learned so well. However,

a new emphasis emerged in the practices and roles of others; some administrators introduced what appeared to be radical changes. The innovator had appeared and as a result we acquired a variety of educational innovations: round schools and windowless schools, team teaching, individualized instruction, continuous progress, independent study, and open climate schools. Many problems of the earlier era simply disappeared because the new administrative style was to refuse to accept them as problems. Most noticeable in this respect was the attitude toward student control in some high schools.

In this era good administration was equated with innovation; the good school was the highly innovative school. In some respects this era still resembled the "administration by imitation" approach of the preceding one. The innovative practices were still borrowed from other school systems; however, we went further afield for ideas about possible new practices. Instead of importing those that had worked in neighboring schools, we imported practices that were still in the experimental stages elsewhere. Professors, superintendents, and principals were impressed by the innovations described at conferences and in the journals. Enthusiasm for innovation, early adoption, and change agentry ran high in many circles. While proponents of educational change were still trying to sell the merits of their plans to foundations in the United States, they had already been adopted by some of the schools in Western Canada!

The principal recognized as being outstanding was the innovator; however, there is room for just so many innovators. Only a limited number of schools or principals can be said to be pioneering in open area teaching, individualized instruction, or whatever else. More

recently, the concept of the good principal has come to mean the one who can make innovations work successfully. Since it is no longer a mark of distinction to have some of these innovative features in schools, it becomes a mark of distinction to actually use them with success over a period of time. But there are already signs that the era of the innovating principal is fading into the past; good administration equated with innovation appears to have had its day.

It is interesting to note why innovation as a feature of the style of operation of principals is on the wane. There seems to be increasing rejection of attaching significance to innovations or to making an innovation work if it is not clear why we are trying to make the innovation work. It no longer seems adequate to try to justify, after the fact, the introduction of innovations by identifying their various advantages over previous practice. In short, it no longer seems acceptable to favor solutions when we are not certain of what problems they solve.

A New Emphasis

The distinctive features of the earlier phases appear to be merging in a new phase which is characterized by an emphasis on planning for change and on developing organizations that can cope with needed changes in future. The "new principalship" is different from that of the preceding phases yet it also draws some of its dynamic from them. This new phase resembles the first one in that it, too, seeks to find a close relationship between problems and solutions. Although the earlier phase also involved a search for solutions, the newer one, hopefully, will extend its search somewhat

more broadly. In this respect it resembles the second phase of administrative practice; however, it differs from this phase in that the search will be more purposeful. Unlike the second phase in which solutions seem to have preceded problems, the new phase will put these into a more logical sequence. This emerging emphasis in the role of a principal might best be characterized by designating the new phase in terms of the principal as planner. Some of the points which follow will serve to clarify the essential similarities and differences of this emphasis in the role with that of the principal as imitator and as innovator. An emphasis on planning in a principal's role implies that he will likely:

1. take an active stance rather than a reactive stance toward environmental and organizational problems. He will not wait for problems to descend upon him so that he is constantly forced to react to crisis situations. Instead he will attempt to anticipate what problems might occur and to prepare for them. Of utmost significance is that he will work toward defining the goals toward which the efforts of a school should be directed and will actively work to achieve those goals.

2. broaden the search for alternative courses of action. Alternatives will be systematically scrutinized in an attempt to assess the appropriateness of various possibilities for achieving goals and for the situations in which they will be applied.

3. place greater emphasis on developing an organization that can cope with problems involved in selection of goals and alternatives rather than on himself as the individual who can perform these functions. The principal as planner and developer will place greater responsibility on various people but will also create the conditions under which they can work effectively toward the achievement of goals.

There are at least two reasons why a planning emphasis in the role of a principal seems appropriate for the next phase of administrative practice. The first is quite general, the other is more specific.

First, it is abundantly clear that the world is not "unfolding as it should" in many respects. This is as true of the educational part of the "world" as it is of any other segment. Not to take a purposeful and a more active stance toward attempting to direct the course of events seems to be avoidance of responsibility. To merely tinker with the various aspects of the operation without adequate attention to purposes is equally irresponsible. Although there are many possibilities for errors in adopting a planning emphasis, we seem to have little choice at this particular time.

Second, there are some indications that principals may be called upon to become more heavily engaged in planning whether they wish to be involved or not. The Report of the Commission on Educational Planning contains numerous proposals which relate either directly or indirectly to planning functions and which hold significant implications for Alberta principals. The concept of planned differentiation at the school level relates most directly to the planning emphasis in the

role of the principal. Planned differentiation raises the possibility of developing differences in educational processes and structures deliberately and not just allowing them to happen accidentally. This concept challenges schools to be more responsive to community and client differences in terms of both present characteristic as well as aspirations. The possibility of planned differentiation together with increased control at the school level thrusts the principal directly into the planning function. If planned differentiation is to be carried out meaningfully, it cannot be left to centralized administration. It can be assisted by the upper administrative levels of the hierarchy but it cannot proceed without local initiative.

If there is any validity to the preceding analysis, then there is an obvious need for both the practicing administrator and those whose task it is to study administration to learn a good deal more about planning than they probably know at present. Fortunately, there is a growing body of literature on the planning function which will serve as a starting point; unfortunately, some of this literature tends to avoid the most critical and the most difficult questions in planning. Since it would be impossible to review the literature, it may be more appropriate to direct attention to the issues that are not dealt with satisfactorily as yet but which are crucial to the success of planning efforts.

Problems in Planning

Planning as an activity can be viewed in highly technical terms. It can be thought of as involving a series of steps in which an

objective is stated in quantifiable terms, in which a program of action is broken down into functions and tasks, in which evaluation procedures are established and for which a variety of flow charts are developed to aid in systematizing the entire undertaking. This is indeed a very important aspect of planning and is one in which some specialists should become highly proficient. There are many educational activities that do lend themselves to these procedures and to the types of analyses implied. However, they are not applicable to all of the goals for which educational systems might wish to strive. Technical aspects of planning seems to come into play only after agreement has been reached on what goals are worth striving for. Planning as a technical function also seems to assume that the alternatives for achieving even the quantifiable goals are somehow more readily identified than is likely to be the case. Each of these -- goals and alternatives -- presents particular difficulties for principals as planners.

The Goal Problem

Implicit in the conception of planning is the general intent to direct attention, energies, and resources toward the achievement of selected goals. As we are all well aware, goals continue to give us difficulties in education. At one extreme we are able to state some very general goals bearing on the satisfaction of individual and societal needs. Although such statements do serve as sources of inspiration and have an important public relations function, they have very limited utility as guides to action in specific situations. At another extreme it is possible to set some very specific goal such as raising the average achievement level of a specified group of

students a specified number of points over a specified time period on a specified measure of achievment. Although such statements do satisfy the technical planning experts, many of us instinctively rebel because we feel that somehow the essence of education has been overlooked. There is no happy medium for the administrator in relation to this dilemma; somehow, planning must be able to cope with both extremes. If the planning expert can't cope with the major questions, then the administrator must do so with the help of others in a different arena.

Planning may be easier if it starts with questions that concern raising achievement levels on specified tests but that does not mean it can logically start there or that it should start at that point. Somewhere in the planning process there must be provisions for asking the more fundamental question of whether it is desirable to raise the performance levels of a particular group, and if so, at what costs and to what purposes. Questions of this nature can't be resolved readily by means of dazzling manipulations of flow charts. They force us to become engaged in a much less systematic fashion of examining goals in education and of asking how we can go about making decisions about those goals.

Even if an attempt were made to ignore the difficult questions, it is perhaps inevitable that planning exercises would bring them to the surface. The administrator who is going to become engaged in planning might as well be prepared for questions such as the following:

- What are schools for and what should this particular school be attempting to achieve?

- What contributions can this school make to the better life of students and to the long-term welfare of both students and society?

- What damage are we now doing to students and how can we eliminate the causes?

The questions may be changed slightly in form but the substance of them is not new to educators. However, we may be called upon to examine them more carefully in future than we have in the past. The slogans to which they usually lead have been easily ignored in everyday operations of schools. A planning orientation may challenge us to link questions and answers more directly to our practices.

General questions such as those listed above raise even more difficult ones related to the operation of schools. When we start to try to identify our real goals we will probably find it difficult to stop the process. We may even begin to ask ourselves questions bearing on what schools would be like if we really accepted certain goals and actively worked to achieve them. For example:

- Would it be possible for schools to take seriously the challenge of a multicultural and pluralistic society?

- Is it possible that schools could play a significant part in the political future of this country if they were to accept as a goal the development of facility in more than one language?

- What would schools be like if they apportioned resources so that those students who had greatest need of teachers and teaching aids would receive them?

- What would schools be like if they were to become truly responsive to community needs? If schools' operational patterns were adjusted to fit more closely to the life styles prevalent in the communities?

These questions relate directly or indirectly to school goals. Obviously they cannot be easily quantified and, consequently, are not appropriate questions for planning experts. They are questions of values. They are moral questions, and they are political questions. They are precisely the kinds of questions which most principals would like to avoid. In the past we have found it convenient to believe that they have been adequately resolved by some other mechanisms at some other levels. Our planning experiences are likely to reveal that this is no longer true, if it ever was.

The process by which solutions to questions of this nature will be sought is difficult to describe. Clearly, it is likely to involve more people particularly at the local level. In relation to questions of this nature, principals may well find themselves talking more to parents, students and teachers than reading directives which emanate from some central office. Activities of this nature will call for new skills as well as for a re-ordering of priorities.

The Alternatives Problem

In the same way that a decision to engage in planning will likely raise questions about the full range of goals so also will it likely call into question the alternatives which we are prepared to consider. Planning will inevitably lead to challenging the existing

conception of acceptable or potential alternatives. Indeed, as you are all aware, startling alternatives to and within education have already been proposed by some who probably would not consider themselves to be planners. Although the innovation phase of administrative practice has already sensitized us to possible alternatives, it is likely that this range will prove to be inadequate once we open the questions concerning broad goals.

Experience has taught us that the search for alternatives is constrained by many factors: the state of knowledge, precedent, as well as by economic, social, and political conditions. Perhaps the ones to which principals and other administrators have been least sensitive are those which operate within the organization of the school itself. In preparation for possible future challenge, some further attention might be given to questions such as the following:

- Must all learning experiences continue to be forced into the standard schedule that still typifies so many schools? Why is it so difficult to inject greater variety into the way in which learning experiences are organized? Must all experiences by dragged out for most students over years in a monotonous pattern?
- What are the possibilities for some real breakthroughs in bringing a broader range of skills and abilities to bear upon the learning process and teaching tasks?

- What are the possibilities for allocating resources according to likely effects rather than according to standardized practices? Is it possible, for example, to shift the pupil-teacher ratio bias in favor of the earlier years of schooling?

These questions probably bring to mind relatively modest alternatives to present practice; in fact, they are suggested by some trends in present practices. The purpose in raising them is to ask the further question of why have the alternatives to conventional practice not been pushed further more dramatically and more purposefully? Although there are some encouraging signs in the operation of educational systems -- particularly in responsiveness to changing conditions -- there are also the more discouraging signs. While some things change, many others stay too much the same. Planning will lead to an examination of those aspects of the operation which have been the most resistant to change; therein reside many potential organizational difficulties.

Concluding Comment

There are some obvious problems to be overcome in developing a planning orientation in the role of the principal. The first is the very real problem of finding the time and the energy to engage in the necessary activities. The only solution may be to allocate some present functions to other members of the school staff. We already have sufficient experience in allocating routine tasks to clerical staff; this trend might be extended. School systems could also help by reducing the number of demands they make on individual

schools. Furthermore, some of the demands which members of teaching staffs now make on administrative time could probably be reduced if teachers were encouraged to become more self-reliant. That is where the development function enters -- providing the crucial environmental conditions which enables members of the organization to cope with their problems instead of passing them on to someone else.

Perhaps there is also reason for optimism that the problems related to goals and alternatives will not prove to be quite as messy as it seems now. In spite of all the differences among the various groups which have a stake in the operation of schools, there are also a good number of unifying elements. Greater involvement of parents, students and teachers in the critical questions concerning school operation may have its challenges but it may also bring its benefits in greater commitment and support. It may be less efficient but it may also be more satisfying than is responding to the wishes of an impersonal bureaucracy.

In contrast with the roles of principal as imitator or principal as innovator, the principal as planner would seem to be in for a good deal more excitement and adventure. Planning has been presented more as a political and moral undertaking than as a technical activity. This has been intentional. If the political and moral problems of planning can be solved, the technical ones will probably prove to be relatively simple.